

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted May 9, 2002 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

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Exciting Developments in Long-Term, Intensive Talmud Study at Maqom!

About one year ago, I offered those who study Talmud with Maqom the option of working with me on a one-on-one basis to do research and create articles about rabbinic literature that would be posted [here](#) at Maqom. With this article, that project is bearing its first fruit. I hope you enjoy reading Rabbi Louis Rieser's research and the papers that have yet to come.

--Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D.

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DREAMS AND DREAM INTERPRETATION

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It is no surprise that Freud was Jewish. As far back as the time of Joseph, Jews have been interpreting dreams. In fact, dream interpretation was extraordinarily important and prayed for an interpretation while the priests recited their benediction over the congregation:

If one had a dream and does not remember what he saw, let him stand before the priests at the time when they spread out their hands [and recite the priestly benediction] and say as follows: Master of the Universe, I am Yours and my dreams are Yours. I have dreamt a dream and I do not know what it is. Whether I have dreamt about myself or my companions have dreamt about me, or I have dreamt about others, if they are good dreams, confirm them and reinforce them like the dreams of Joseph and if they require a remedy heal them, as the waters of Marah were healed by Moses, our teacher, and as Miriam was healed of her leprosy and Hezekiah of his sickness and the waters of Jericho by Elisha. As You turned the curse of wicked Balaam into a blessing, so turn all my dreams into something good for me. He should conclude his prayer along with the priests so that the congregation may answer: Amen!

If he cannot manage to [to say all] this one should say: You who rule on high, who lives in might, You are peace and your name is peace. May it be Your will to bestow peace on us. (B. Berachot 55b)

This short passage is part of a "tractate" on dreams (B. Berachot 55a-57b) that shows a person how to interpret dreams and stories of dream interpreters. In that "tractate" we also find out that the sages considered dreams to be akin to prophecy:

These things are a sixtieth part [of something else]: namely fire, honey, and Sabbath, and sleep and a dream. Fire is one-sixtieth part of Gehinnom. Honey is one-sixtieth part of manna. Sabbath is one-sixtieth part of the world to come. Sleep is one-sixtieth a part of death. A dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy. (B. Berachot 57b)

The figure of 1/60 is the standard way of saying "something so small as to be insignificant". Mesopotamia had a base-60 number system which is why we have 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour and 360 degrees in a sphere and why numbers such as 6 and 12 are so important (12 people on a jury, 12 months in a year, chai is 6 x 3).

Discussion Questions:

1. The most critical question about a dream seems to be if it portends sickness and the incidents listed here are miraculous healings that God gave to the world. Yet we have learned elsewhere (T. Berachot 6:7 http://www.maqom.com/mar28_2002.html) that one may not pray for a miracle. Sometimes, we feel we need a miracle . . . or at the very least, help from God. When is it appropriate to cry out from your heart in a way that is not "halakhically" right?
2. Do you interpret your dreams? Do they show you what is to come or only illuminate what has happened?
3. Gehinnom is the Hebrew word for Hell. You may have been taught that we do not believe in heaven or hell. The sages certainly did. Will the idea of heaven and hell change the way you live your life?
4. The long prayer, above, is to be said during the priestly benediction. Why do you think it is said at that point in the service? God bless the sages! They knew that some folks wouldn't be able to say that whole long thing so they give us a short form of the prayer that works as well. What other prayers do the sages shorten? What prayers do you shorten?